

The History of TRUCEN

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By the early years of this new century it was evident that increasing numbers of colleges and universities had undertaken numerous innovative efforts to reinvigorate and prioritize students' civic and community engagement in their surrounding communities. Volunteer programs driven by students had started up in huge numbers, and academically based service-learning programs led by faculty members had proliferated across higher education. At some institutions faculty were experimenting with building community-engaged research activities into the curriculum or focusing their own research agendas on the growing, diverse forms of citizen action taking place in society—research *on* civic engagement.

However, a number of individuals involved with these movements had noticed that much of the most ambitious and innovative work was taking place in teaching-focused community and liberal arts colleges and state universities. Research universities were relatively less involved, despite the significant efforts of many of their faculty and staff members who had undertaken to promote and advance civic engagement in these institutions.

Recognizing the need to encourage engaged scholarship at research universities and these institutions' potential to provide leadership in this arena, Campus Compact executive director Liz Hollander, and Rob Hollister, dean of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University, decided in 2005 to convene scholars from some of the research universities that were advanced in civic work to discuss how their institutions were promoting engagement on their campuses and in their communities, the success they had experienced, and the challenges they faced. Hollander and Hollister had a sense that research university colleagues who wished to advance civic engagement at these institutions faced particular challenges that were different from those faced by faculty and staff at teaching-focused institutions. Further, they felt that existing forums that convened those involved in service-learning and engaged scholarship usually included few research-university-based colleagues, so their issues rarely were addressed with any depth. They therefore hoped that this meeting would provide space for in-depth exploration of the opportunities and special challenges relating to civic engagement work at research-intensive institutions.

Thus in October 2005 individuals from 13 research universities met at Tufts for a two-day meeting. The group not only shared their ideas but decided to take action by becoming a more prominent and visible “voice for leadership” in the larger civic engagement movement in higher education. As a first expression of that voice, they began development of a case statement that outlined why it was important for research universities to embrace and advance engaged scholarship as a central component of their activities and programs at every level: institutional, faculty, and student. That statement, which was prepared during several months following the meeting and endorsed by the entire group, argued that research universities’ top-tier faculty, outstanding students, considerable financial resources, and state-of-the-art research facilities position them to contribute to community change relatively quickly and in ways that could ensure deeper longer-lasting commitment to civic engagement across the entire higher education sector.

To advance this process, the group developed a set of recommendations for what research universities could do to promote engaged scholarship at their own institutions, across research universities generally, and potentially throughout higher education. The group’s rationale and recommendations are contained in its first report, *New Times Demand New Scholarship: Research Universities and Civic Engagement—A Leadership Agenda*, published by Tufts University in 2006 and available at <http://www.compact.org/initiatives/civic-engagement-at-research-universities/>. Most important, by the end of the Tufts meeting the group had decided to invite a small number of additional research university colleagues to join them and convene a second meeting at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) the following year. Campus Compact was able to support the preparation of the report and planning for the UCLA meeting with funds obtained from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

TRUCEN’s second meeting was held in February 2007 at UCLA and was attended by 23 individuals from 22 research institutions. California Campus Compact served as a cosponsor and assisted UCLA with planning. This group decided to focus on opportunities and challenges in four areas critical to expanding and institutionalizing civic engagement within research universities:

- engaged scholarship (research in any field that partners university scholarly resources with those in the public and private sectors to enrich knowledge, address and help solve critical societal problems, and contribute to the public good);

- scholarship focused on civic and community engagement (research focused on civic participation in public life, including participation by engaged scholars, and on the impacts of this work on all constituencies);
- the education of students for civic and community engagement (what students need to know and be able to do as active, effective citizens of a diverse democracy);
- institutionalization: advancing civic engagement within and across research universities (challenges to and effective strategies for institutionalizing civic engagement within a research university context).

Opportunities and Challenges

As group members shared developments in their work at their respective institutions over the time since meeting at Tufts, they were impressed with how much progress had been made and how many new initiatives were under way, even as major challenges remained. The extent of civic engagement scholarship and education at research universities had grown substantially. Presidents and provosts of many of these institutions, as well as a growing cadre of faculty, were exerting forceful leadership to elevate civic engagement both programmatically and organizationally. An increasing number of research universities had established new high-level positions and university-wide coordinating councils to elevate their civic engagement functions.

Nevertheless, as encouraged as group members were by these developments, they agreed that there was much more that research universities can and should do. Therefore, as with the Tufts group, those convened at UCLA decided to publish a report of their deliberations, in which they would call attention to the significant opportunities civic and community engagement offers to research institutions seeking to renew their civic commitments, strengthen their research and teaching, and contribute positively and effectively to their local communities and those more distant. They also sought to offer a discussion of challenges to establishing and sustaining engaged scholarship presented by research university contexts. By sharing their conversation—their questions and conclusions—they sought to stimulate colleagues to consider how they, as individual scholars and teachers, as well as institutional citizens, could help realize the research university's historic, civic mission

by advancing civic and community engagement to support both campus priorities and a more healthy, just, and sustainable world. This second report, *New Times Demand New Scholarship II: Research Universities and Civic Engagement—Opportunities and Challenges*, published by UCLA in 2007, is also available at <http://www.compact.org/initiatives/civic-engagement-at-research-universities/>.

Inspired by this conversation, these colleagues decided to meet a third time in February 2008 and to again invite a few additional research institutions and colleagues to join their ranks. The University of North Carolina (UNC) offered to host the meeting, which was planned by a committee of group members. The planning committee decided this third meeting should focus discussion on both substantive and operational questions. Substantively, the group wanted to have a deep, focused discussion on community-engaged research—its definitions and diverse practice and the recognition and rewards (including potential for tenure and promotion) colleagues gain for their involvement in and leadership of this work. Operationally, the meeting planners wanted to encourage in-depth discussion on the future of this growing network. Should it continue? If so, how? With what resources, and so on?

As with the first two meetings, the UNC session's outcomes were considerable. Rather than publish a third report of its substantive deliberations on engaged scholarship, the convened group decided to launch an online “toolkit,” or annotated bibliography, of emergent literature on community-engaged scholarship that would be of interest and relevance to a research university audience. Jeffrey Howard (University of Michigan) and Tim Stanton (Stanford University) volunteered to serve as editors. Over the year following the meeting, and with assistance from the other group members, Howard and Stanton compiled and published the *Research University Engaged Scholarship Toolkit*, which was posted in 2009 on the Campus Compact website at <http://www.compact.org/initiatives/civic-engagement-at-research-universities/trucen-overview/>.

On the operational side, the assembled colleagues decided that the network should both continue and be further expanded. Institutions admitted to membership would be very high research universities as classified by Carnegie and active members of Campus Compact. There also was a commitment to gradually expand the membership each year with an eye toward diversifying the group geographically. A formal ongoing steering committee was created, and the group adopted a name, The Research University Community Engagement Network (TRUCEN).

In 2009, 28 TRUCEN members convened at Stanford to focus on case studies and discussion of faculty and institutional environments that promote engaged scholarship at research universities, and on institutional support of community-based service-learning and research by undergraduate and graduate students. The case studies were drawn from the experience of faculty members committed to engaged scholarship at TRUCEN member institutions. The student-focused session included a panel of undergraduate and graduate students involved in community work at both Stanford and the University of California, Berkeley.

TRUCEN's fifth meeting took place in February 2010 at the University of Georgia with 30 participants in attendance from 25 research universities. Focus for this meeting was on the role of research universities with "P-20 Education" and on "Measuring Engagement"—how are research institutions going about evaluating and assessing their engagement work on and off campus. Attention was also given to discussion and drafting of a clear mission and goals statement for the network, which had been drafted by a members' working group prior to the meeting. This statement was published in the summer 2010 issue of *Compact Currents*, which is available at <http://www.compact.org/about/compact-current/>. Perhaps most important, at this meeting the network accepted an invitation from the editor of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* to support and contribute to a special issue focused on TRUCEN in which this article appears.

Most recently, in February 2011 TRUCEN's sixth meeting took place at Georgetown University, convening 41 participants representing 35 institutions. At this meeting the network renewed its focus on community-engaged scholarship with a promotion and tenure study at Michigan State University (Glass, Doberneck & Schweitzer, 2008) as a case study. In addition, participants discussed case examples from the University of California (community-engaged scholarship in the core undergraduate curriculum), the University of Massachusetts Amherst (the impact of educating for civic engagement on student development), and from KerryAnn O'Meara's (University of Maryland) research on "faculty civic agency" at a variety of institutions.

In six short years, what began as a gathering of committed but largely disconnected individual advocates and practitioners of engaged scholarship at research universities has matured into a growing, structured network of colleagues who collaborate on behalf of advancing this movement within this sector of higher education. Participation has been hugely valuable to its members.

As noted by one TRUCEN member, Victoria Robinson (University of California, Berkeley), “This network, being part of a cadre of like-minded colleagues who are confronting similar challenges, gives me courage to make the case for engaged scholarship at my institution.”

TRUCEN’s work has also at least partially achieved the vision of the network founders in showing the way forward for higher education more generally, as noted by another member, Eric Mlyn (Duke University):

TRUCEN has been of great value to me and to Duke, because we are eager to learn from other comparable institutions, how do they organize their civic engagement work? How do they engage their faculty? In addition TRUCEN has enabled me to share what Duke has accomplished through initiatives such as Duke Engage. In our discussions we not only talk about what we have accomplished, but also about how to tweak and improve it through the comments and feedback we get from our fellow members. . . . What may be more important, however, is the relationships that I have developed within the network. I just finished co-sponsoring a conference on global civic engagement with Amanda Moore McBride (Washington University) that attracted interest from a wide variety of institutions far beyond the TRUCEN network. This would not have happened without TRUCEN.

At that first Tufts meeting participants sat around the table bemoaning the fact that while there were shining examples of community-engaged scholarship within their institutions, there was a serious, more general lack of public leadership for this work within the research-intensive university sector. In looking around the table toward the end of that meeting, many participants had the sudden realization that the leaders they sought were in fact themselves, that they would have to become the public advocates for this work in these challenging contexts. This realization sparked the decision to move forward with publications and following meetings. TRUCEN’s ranks have swelled and the movement has advanced and gained strength. However, as anyone committed to community-engaged scholarship at a research-intensive university knows, there remain miles to go. TRUCEN hopes that this special issue of the *Journal* will advance us along a path toward truly

engaged research institutions, and intends to continue its dialogue and advocacy into the future.

Reference

Doberneck, D., & Schweitzer, J. (2008). Outreach and engagement in promotion and tenure, National Center for the Study of University Engagement, Michigan State University.

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